

My name is Lynne Carnemolla from Tolland. It is with utmost respect to the challenge of reducing the budget that I implore you to DENY proposed Appropriations Bill 6380 to split and consolidate the Board of Education and Services for the Blind.

My 14 year old son has been a client of BESB since birth. From the life-altering moment that we found out about his impairment to this very moment, BESB has been a part of our life. They have instructed, listened, and guided us through every year of our son's life. We had no idea how to raise a child with a visual impairment. We didn't know any, not one single blind person. We didn't even know there was an agency for the blind. But they knew and have known for 118 years. That is an immeasurable body of knowledge which is now in jeopardy of being split apart and destroyed.

Recently I was reminded by a state representative that I have the right to ask the legislature questions and so I ask you... why? Why would you make these life-changing affects to the blind community?

Before children, I was a Human Resources Director, well aware of the budgeting issues in running a business and the need to run a tight ship. My background supplies me with the knowledge that you must first recognize the financial implications of the budget and then the personal affects.

So I went straight to the source and reviewed the Governor's budget and state fiscal documents. I found that the web is full of historical information which details the agency's history of struggling to meet its budget. That is no longer the case. I quickly became proud of current BESB's ability to run a lean agency. In fact according to page 407 of the budget-in-detail, for year ending 6/30/11, BESB's general net fund ran a significant surplus of over \$500,000. The splitting and consolidation's financial savings would be only \$410,000; savings which do not consider additional costs inherent to creating separate divisions of the agency i.e. embossers/Braille library/technology.

I was then disgusted by the fact that this consolidation is being considered when the savings are less than the amount actually saved by BESB through streamlined processes. BESB has accounted for funds in a meaningful way and have met all of the State's continued reductions and cutbacks throughout the past eight years.

Why? Why then would you take this lean agency, split it apart and put the vocational services into a larger agency which, as stated in State Comptroller Kevin Lembo's February 1, 2011 monthly letter to Governor Malloy, is projecting the "largest single deficiency totals \$221 million within the Department of Social Services" and further overload an agency that "has seen dramatic caseload increases in basic support programs." If BESB becomes one cog in a giant machine, its focus will be lost and its mission inevitably diluted.

Blindness is a significantly low incident disability which requires specialized services provided by specialized teachers. Why then? Why would you take a service based program such as the

So Why? Why would you gamble with the blind community's quality of life? If savings are minimal and possibly non-existent why change the current positive outcomes and **negatively affect a community** that has to struggle everyday, of every year. BESB is the blind community's main support system.

In the past few years, a new light has been shed on CT's blind children. A fresh, empowering attitude has prevailed over the development of meaningful programs. Within their budget the agency has been able to expand their services and programs for teenagers. A group, as you know, who need positive, empowering, events with true peers. Programs run by people who understand the specific needs, challenges and gifts of each blind student; Programs such as **"Camp Abilities, Peer Mentoring, LIFE, Essential Skills and Student Advisory Board."** Historically if we wanted to have our kids go to a camp, find true peers, learn social and daily living skills, we had to go to another state. Now we have the ability to take part in community events right here in CT. I cannot express how significant it is to be able to find these opportunities locally and the pride, self-esteem, and friendship it gives to our kids.

And because of privacy regulations, BESB cannot share personal information to join the blind community together. Yet through parent seminars, mentoring opportunities, camps, and activities we have been empowered to find other parents and families to reach out, to share knowledge, lend support and to be a true community.

In school we have seen that when kids don't understand or know how to communicate with a visually impaired child, they aren't necessarily mean, but they do ignore them, taking advantage of their own anonymity with silence. Just because blindness is a low-incidence minority does not mean that our needs should be ignored. **Please** don't take advantage of our children's future by ignoring their needs and **please** don't be silent and ignore the requests of Connecticut's blind community by taking away our single binding support system. BESB is our lifeline to a brighter future.